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People's Reporter

A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

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World Communion of Reformed Churches

Guided by Faith and Justice: Rev. Philip Vinod Peacock Installed as WCRC General Secretary

On Feb. 1, 2026, at the Reformed Church in Hannover, Germany, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) marked a historic moment. Then the Rev. Philip Vinod Peacock, became the first leader from Asia of the WCRC, to hold the position of the global communion, drawing friends, colleagues, and ecumenical partners from around the world to witness the occasion.

A message from Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), was delivered on his behalf, highlighting the significance of Peacock's appointment. Pillay, a former WCRC president, praised Peacock's rare blend of scholarship, faith, and action.

"Philip brings a rare combination of scholarship, faith, and action," Pillay said. "His work on economic and ecological justice, his teaching on Dalit and feminist theology, and his prophetic voice in initiatives like *Focus*

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Guided by Faith and Justice: Rev. Philip Vinod Peacock Installed as WCRC General Secretary

World Council of Churches

Water Justice Movements demand human rights focus at the UN Conference

Water justice movements, including faith-based networks and civil society groups, are holding the United Nations accountable as the world prepares for only the third UN Water Conference in 50 years.

At the High-Level Preparatory Meeting held in Dakar, Senegal, from 25 to 27 January, the People's Water Forum – which includes the World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical Water Network – issued a statement challenging corporate influence in global water governance, and reiterating nine demands from the Water Justice Manifesto signed by more than 500 organizations.

The 2026 UN Water Conference will take place from 2 to 4 December in the United Arab Emirates, co-hosted by Senegal and the UAE. After the first UN water conference in 1977 in Mar del Plata, Argentina, the UN took a 45-year hiatus before organizing the second conference in New York in 2023. Corporate sectors filled that void, dominating water policy through forums like the World Water Forum. Grassroots movements found these forums largely out of reach, with registration fees at 1,000 euros and side events costing 2.500 euros.

Dinesh Suna, WCC programme executive for Land, Water, and Food and coordinator of the Ecumenical Water Network, co-facilitated Interactive Dialogue on "Water for Planet" at Dakar. There were six interactive dialogues. He presented a stakeholder "think piece" urging shifts in water governance, ecosystem protection and climate resilience. Freshwater ecosystems are water-giving systems, the think piece stated, and outlined recommendations including integrating water policies across climate, biodiversity, and land management.

Dinesh Suna (second from the left) among the rapporteurs and facilitators of Stakeholder Consultation, presenting reports of their Interactive Dialogue sessions *Photo:* People's Water Forum

People's Water Forum, in a statement, challenged the conference architecture: "The Conference architecture entrenches multi-stakeholder governance as the dominant mode of engagement, placing corporations and financial actors on equal footing with states and communities whose lives and livelihoods depend on water."

The People's Water Forum called for a formal intergovernmental mechanism that ensures the primacy of human rights, creates binding commitments for universal water access by 2030, cancels unsustainable debt, and rejects market-based governance models that deepen global inequities.

In the months ahead, water justice movements will push to ensure that marginalized communities and faith-based organizations remain central to global water policy discussions.

– WCC News

People's Reporter
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A substitute for the UN!

On 22 January 2026, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum at Davos, a new international organisation named The Board of Peace (BoP) was formally established. The BoP, earlier proposed by the US President Mr. Donald Trump, as part of the second phase of the 20-point Peace Plan to reconstruct war-torn Gaza through demilitarisation and technocratic governance, was then endorsed by the UN Security Council with the abstention of Russia and China in November 2025.

Although the UNSC approved formation of the Board to work until 2027 and with Gaza as the sole focus, as per indications, it is going to be a permanent establishment without any time frame and strict country restrictions for operation. In fact, its charter does not expressly mention Gaza, and Mr. Trump indicated "potential expansion of its mandate to engage in promoting peace around the world and working to resolve conflicts". Therefore, this body may emerge itself as a substitute for the 'ineffective UN'!

While Mr. Trump is the chairman, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, US special envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff, Mr. Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, Apollo CEO Marc Rown, World Bank President Ajay Banga, and the security advisor Robert Gabriel are members of the founding executive board. Although the President invited 50 countries and private entities to join The Board, only 20 representatives were present at the signing ceremony of the document, at Davos. While the membership of The Board will be for three years, those countries which donate $1 billion within the first year, are eligible to become permanent members. While France, Sweden, Norway and Slovenia have declined the invitation to join the Board, Germany and the UK have expressed reservation. India has not yet revealed its decision in this regard. Owing to the growing rift with Prime Minister Mark Carney, Mr. Trump has withdrawn the invitation to Canada. While Mr. Netanyahu, accused of genocide by the UN agencies should be included, Palestinian President will not be a member. This pattern of membership shows that this body is made to dance to the tune of the President of the US.

The BoP was created as the second phase of the 20-point Peace Plan in Gaza. However, any reference to the path to Palestinian state is made neither in the charter nor orally in the signing ceremony. Pakistan's decision to join the Board is a matter of concern for India, particularly if Mr. Trump decides to include the Kashmir dispute to the BoP's peace plan. The BoP's two-tier membership, offering "permanent" membership for a fee of one billion dollars is another danger signal.

The formation of this international body at a time when the UN proved its inability to prevent military interventions by the big powers, and its incompetence in resolving conflicts on the one hand, and the recent announcement of President Trump about the decision of the US to withdraw from the 66 international organisations including 31 UN bodies, on the other, signify the intensification of neo-imperialist interventions by the US. The situation of abduction of the President Maduro from Venezuela, preparations for military interventions in Iran and the threat about take-over of Greenland by the US remaining unquestioned both by the UN and the big powers, has already pushed the world to be the vicitim of the law of the jungle. Working of this BoP as a substitute for the UN under this scenario, may be one of the biggest threats human civilisation has ever faced.

Thought for the Fortnight

The UN was created
not to take mankind to heaven,
but to save humanity from hell

– Dag Hommarskjold –

God with us on the Road

M. Mani Chacko

God is a God on the road with us. This is most clearly expressed in God's journey with his people as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:20-22). God is the exiled God: the glory of God leaves the temple (Ezekiel 8:1 to 11:25) and God joins His people in exile. God as God on the move is clearly seen in the New Testament narratives: for example, Jesus' refugee status in the flight from Herod's killing fields; Jesus' marginal status as coming from the rogue province of Galilee; his non-professional status in the hierarchical society of his time; his itinerant ministry in Palestine; his subsequent transition from outskirts to the Centre of power in Jerusalem; and, most centrally, his migration into human form in the incarnation.

The basic premise of a theology of Incarnation is that God, in Jesus, so loved the world that God incarnated into the far and distant country of our broken human existence and laid down His life on a cross so that we could be reconciled to God and enjoy renewed fellowship at all levels of our relationships. Reading the Christian tradition from an Incarnational perspective involves perceiving what God is doing in the world through Jesus Christ and understanding God's desire to cross over the barriers that divide and alienate our relationships.

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Former General Secretary,
Bible Society of India,
Former Director, Ecumenical Christian Centre, Whitefield, Bangalore,
and Former Principal, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and
Research Institute, Chennai.

Bible scholars identify four foundations of such an Incarnational theology:

a. *Imago Dei* - crossing the problem-person divide.

b. *Verbum Dei* - crossing the divine-human divide.

c. *Missio Dei* - crossing the human-human divide.

d. *Visio Dei* - crossing the country-kingdom of God divide.

These foundations give expression to the ways in which God reconciles the world to Himself, breaks down the divisions in our relationships and helps us understand God's movement into our world and our response to God's grace.

The notion of the *Imago Dei* (Image of God) emerges in the earliest pages of the scripture, where we learn that human beings are not just what we label them, but people who bear God's own image and likeness. If people are only seen as workers, or worse, as lawbreakers, aliens, or criminals, then their suffering makes no moral claims on us. **At the core of the problem-person divide is the experience of dehumanization.** What people who suffer injustice often say is, what is most difficult for them is not the physical pain and suffering they undergo because of injustice. What hurts them most are the indignities, when people treat you like you are a dog, like you are a piece of dirt, like you are worth nothing as a human being.

The second theological notion central to the incarnation debate is the *Verbum Dei* (Word of God). In the Incarnation, God, in Jesus, crosses the divide that exists between divine life and human life. In the Incarnation, God comes to people, making His way into the far country of human discord and disorder, a place of division and dissension, a territory marked by death and the demeaning treatment of human beings. In Matthew's account God not only takes on human flesh and enters our world, but God becomes a refugee when His family flees political persecution and escapes into Egypt (Matt 2:13-15). Jesus assumes the human condition of the most vulnerable among us, undergoing hunger, thirst, rejection, and injustice, walking the way of the cross, overcoming the forces of death that threaten human life. He enters the broken territory of human experience and offers his own wounds in solidarity with those who are in pain. **The Jesus story opens for the suffering humanity a reason to hope, especially in what often seems like a hopeless predicament.**

If the *Verbum Dei* is about God crossing over the divine-human divide, *Missio Dei* (Mission of God), is crossing the human-human divide. *Missio Dei* proclaims a God of life engaged in the process of building up a civilization of love to restore the *Imago Dei* in every person through the redemptive work of the *Verbum Dei*. **The universal message of the Gospel is directed to all nations and all peoples, and it is concerned with all aspects of human beings and the full development of every person.** The church, through the power of the Spirit, takes up the Great Commission of Jesus by going to all nations, proclaiming the Good News of Salvation, and working against the forces of sin that disfigure the *Imago Dei* (Mt. 28:16–20).

Jesus' openness to Gentiles, his reaching out to the Syrophoenician or Canaanite

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Theology offers not just more information but a new imagination. It supplies a way of thinking about Incarnation that keeps the human issues at the center of the debate and reminds us that our own existence as a pilgrim people on the move. Christian discipleship leads us to overcome all that divides us to reconcile our relationships, reminding us that the more difficult walls to cross are the ones that exist in the hearts of each of us. We are unable to cross these divides by ourselves. Christian faith rests ultimately in the one who incarnated from heaven to earth and, through His death and resurrection, passed over from death to life.

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Attitude of the Political Zionists and its backfire on the credibility of the First Testament

Solomon Victus

[Second and concluding part of the paper 'Attitude of the Political Zionists and its backfire on the credibility of the First Testament']

In my perception, Christian Zionists as well as almost the majority of Christian congregations in India are superficially carried away by the emotional attachment towards the Zionists and the Holy Land. Many conservative Christians have faithfully aligned with the political Zionists without considering the consequences, and have tried to justify the Nazification of Israel, bloody violence over the Gazans, impoverishing children, blockading food cargos, bombarding civilian houses, schools and hospitals in the name of terrorists. I could see a mood of superiority complex, vengeance and an unrestrained spirit of nationalism prevailing among them to annihilate another religious sect in the name of the scriptures.

To comprehend this complex issue we need to go into the subtle psychological dilemmas the Zionist Israelis are undergoing currently. An Israeli journalist, Gideon Levy exposes the 3 core "values" that are driving Israel's behaviour. "Values which I see as the core of Israeli society nowadays: three sets of values which explain everything in my view. The **first** very deep-rooted value, let's face it, is the value that 'We are the chosen people.' Secular and religious people will claim so, and even if they don't admit it they feel so. And the implementation is very simple: if we are the chosen people, who are you to tell us what to do; who are you, who is the international community to tell us Israel what to do? International law is a wonderful thing but it doesn't apply to us. It applies to any other place on earth, but not on Israel because we are the chosen people. Don't you understand it? The **second** very deep-rooted value is obviously the value of 'We are the victims: not only the biggest victims, but the only victims around.' I don't recall one occupation in which the occupier presents himself as the victim, not only victim but the only victim. I quote here the late Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir, who once said, 'I will never forgive the Arabs for forcing us to kill their children.' We are the victims: we are forced to kill their children, poor us. And the victim and the only victim in the history again, it enables us the rights to do whatever we want, and nobody is to tell us what to do because we are the only victims. The **third** very deep-rooted value, and this is the very deep belief again, everyone will deny it but if you scratch under the skin of almost all every Israeli you will find it there. 'The Palestinians are not equal human beings like us. They are not like us. They don't love their children like us. They don't love life like us.' This is very, very deep rooted in Israeli society and maybe it is the key issue, because as long as this continues nothing will be moved; as long as most of the Israelis don't perceive the Palestinians as equal human beings. We are so much better than them. We are so much developed than them and we are so much human than them. As long as this is the case, all our dreams – and we have some dreams, and I'll get to them – all our dreams will never become true as long as this core issue will not change."[8]

No books are sacred unless they are proved and practised by humans as being helpful as well as creative in taking the society and binding different people in a cohesive manner. The holiness of the sacred books is not demonstrated by the scriptures themselves but only by the attitude of the adherents and believers. Our attitude decides our altitudes!

The Rev. Dr. Solomon Victus is a former Professor of Social Analysis at Tamilnadu Theological Seminary at Madurai, Tamil Nadu

Backfire on the First Testament:

From the above background we need to have a brief analysis how the Zionists are able to project the First Testament or Torah and keep the Ten Commandments in front of the global community. It may be Jewish literature and sacred texts to them, yet the Zionists must realise that it is also the sacred scripture of Christians and Muslims. We are all aware that the First Testament (Old Testament) history is not totally free from wars and violence since it was framed in a period of tribalism. However we need to remind ourselves that such fights and wars were between nomads without bombs and satellites. The Bible even says they were using trumpet noise to pull down the wall of Jericho. The First Testament Hebrew writers were never encouraged, using then sophisticated weapons like the horses and chariots of their contemporary empires.

The question is in what way is the First Testament (FT) unique to the Indian Christians? In what way could the FT be relevant to our Indian contexts today? I remember there were many early Indian Christian theologians like P. Chenchiah who had problems in having the FT along with the Second Testament (New Testament) in the past. We need not go in that way of rejecting and replacing FT but we need to have a critical understanding about it. We definitely need the FT in order to understand at least Jesus Christ and his teachings as well as his inherited Jewish traditions on which he was speaking and interpreting.

Let us try to discern in what ways certain FT texts are seen as terror, as Prof. Phyllis Trible explained from the feminist perspective in her well-known book, *Texts of Terror*? Why did biblical scholars like Prof Norman Gottwald take pains to have deep archaeological studies as well as anthropological studies on the issue of peaceful settlement of the Israel people in Canaan rather than violent invasion? The liberal left-wing scholars were and are trying hard to redeem the scriptural interpretations from the clutches of right-wing hermeneutics, for they were and are very unconstructive for societal development. We need to discern why right-wing Christians are happy with the literal reading of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah because they are very comfortable for crazy projects like ethnic purity, ethnic cleansing, male chauvinistic mentality, etc. Any book from the Bible for that matter is very convenient to the conservative interpretations which take the society backwards.

The sole concern of the left-wing hermeneutical interpreters is to treat the Bible as a scripture available for the social transformation despite it having partly the elements of terror, conservatism and fundamentalism. In this way the left-wing interpretations pursue a path of rationalisation, radicalisation and secularisation, and render these to the modern generation which tries to purify scriptures from the status quo theories, justifying all inequalities in the name of race, caste, ethnicity, gender and language. Although left-wing interpreters try to redeem the interpretations from the conservatives it is still a hard task to continue. This struggle is prevalent among all religious interpretations. **For instance, Gandhi was writing an interpretation to *Bhagavat Gita* from a liberal perspective, while it is used by the hard core *Hindutvavadis* for their political agenda, rejecting violence in any form, and he writes "Violence is simply not possible unless one is driven by anger, by ignorant love and by hate."[9]**

In conclusion I feel that the freedom of religion does not simply consist in choosing violent or non-violent paths but in respecting the beliefs and traditions of others as well as drawing everyone including secularists to the democratic paths of social transformations. It is not a hegemonic coordination but collegial cooperation. The acceptable role of religion in our time need not require annihilation of another ethnic group with the help their scriptures as weapon: rather it must help humanising all weapons of mass destruction and converting them into productive forces. Special religious claims and exclusive rights have no place on this earth in this modern secular technological era, and also will not last in the long run. **No books are sacred unless they are proved and practised by humans as being helpful as well as creative in taking the society and binding different people in a cohesive manner. The holiness of the sacred books is not demonstrated by the scriptures themselves but only by the attitude of the adherents and believers. Our attitude decides our altitudes!**

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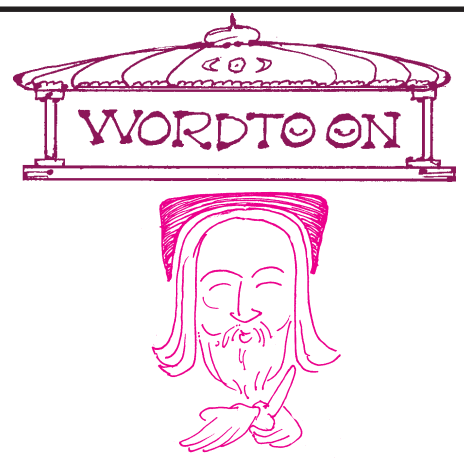

Footnotes

[8] https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1BDQ5MSYEC/ accessed on 21/10/25

[9] M.K.Gandhi, The Bhagavatgita, New Delhi: Orient Publishers, 1998 (Eight Print), p.12-15.

Crossing the Boundaries with Jesus

Reni K. Jacob

John 4.1-12,
Luke 9:51 - 55

The gospels have many evidences of caste conflicts prevailed in the holy land of Palestine 2000 years ago. In John Chapter 4 we read that jews had been treating the Samaritans as social outcastes and as untouchables, though the Samaritans were also originally of the Jewish religion and of the Hebrew parentage with patriarchs like Jacob (Vs 5and 6). In course of time, a part of the chosen race of Israel had virtually come to be treated as outcastes and untouchables.

Discrimination on the basis of gender, social, geographical or racial state, is tantamount to marring the image of God. Biblical advocacy is a response to the violation of the character and concerns of God. The tendency to consider those living outside the boundaries, as objects of charity is to be questioned. They are also people of God with the same dignity and worth created in the image and likeness of God. By being with the discriminated people, Jesus was protesting the attitude of the majority community towards them. We, as Christians, are called to break the boundaries and to cross the boundaries.

Burn down the village - The popular attitude against them (Luke 9:51-55)

The disciples wanted to burn the whole village of Samaritans because they did not allow them to stay overnight. The disciples went to the extent of referring the scriptures to support their pride and prejudice. Like Elijah they wanted the divine power to be used to bring down fire on these wretched Samaritan illiterates. (1 Kings.18:38). Caste hatred is always connected with historical reasons. The disciples only thought of this and the leader (Jesus) stopped them from thinking in that line. **Even today high caste people burn down harijan villages, rape the women and kill them for no reason of theirs. Many a time this is done with an eye on political power and vote bank.**

In the case of an inter caste love affair, if it is between a lower caste man with an upper caste woman, there is all possibility that the village will be burnt down. If the case is the other way round, the case may be settled without much issue. **The upper caste crossing the boundary is considered as benevolence whereas the lower caste crossing the boundary is considered as pride and not accepted culturally.**

Jesus was indignant and he condemned the disciples, as being inspired by the evil spirit and said 'the son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them' Lu: 9:55-56.

Caste people have no right to defend themselves!

The poor caste people are always expected to act according to the whims and fancies of the rich upper caste people. They have no rights including the right to defend themselves. The upper caste people always expect submissive attitude from the lower caste because of the culture of historical suppression. They have no right to believe in what they want to believe! If they want to change their faith to Christ, they are discriminated against, by denying the rights of reservation. This is a violation of their fundamental right to equality (Art.14), right to live (Art. 21) and right to religion (Art: 25-28).

Among the South Indian Christians there are separate churches for Dalits and Non Dalits, and if only one church for both, separate seating arrangements are made naturally! Also there are two separate cemeteries in some contexts! The Dalit Christians are discriminated against, in matters of election, appointment and transfer of pastors, selection of alter boys and also in the administration of the church related institutions. The use of caste titles are prevalent in these communities, and inter-dining and inter-marrying with non-Dalits Christians are still dreams for Dalit Christians. In many cases, evangelism and church unions are coloured by the practice of caste discrimination. **The Dalit Christians are suffering from four fold alienations: from the state, upper caste people, fellow Christians of no Dalit origin as well as non Christian dalits.**

Jesus crossed Geographical boundaries 4:3, 4

Jews avoided traveling thorough Samaria on the route between Judea and Galilee. They would go east cross the Jordan river go north or south bypass Samaria and then cross Jordan again when they neared their destination. Samaria was considered a foreign territory. **Jesus took the less traveled road. Jesus stayed in Samaria for 2 days (Vs 40). Indeed it was in Samaria he was acknowledged as 'Saviour of the world' (Vs. 42). Jesus took risky path by saying we have to go (V4) showing the divine compulsion. Messiah comes not only to Israel but also to those Israel despised. (Mk: 7.24-30).**

Jesus being a Rabbi surrounded by disciples crossing the geographical boundary is easy when compared to a Samaritan crossing the Jewish

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boundary. **Inter caste mutual communications is always controlled by the upper caste and not by the lower caste and that too depends on the gender position and the social status.**

Jesus crossed racial boundaries V. 4 - 6

Jews and Samaritans had nursed animosity towards each other for centuries based on origin and purity of race. Walls of racial purity and superiority over the other, were created. **Using the word Samaritan to call a person was derogatory and would amount to call somebody with caste name in our context. Jesus was called 'Samaritan by the angry Jews when they wanted to insult him. (John 8.48).** Samaritans are considered as impure, mixed race, product of colonization, and as idolaters. (II Kings 17:34-35). Samaritans considered themselves as descendants of a faithful nucleus of ancient Israel (Vs. 6 - Jacob's well).

Jesus crossed social boundaries 4:9

Notions of purity and impurity lead to unsociability. Jews would not drink or eat from the same vessel the Samaritans used. (Vs.5)Even the disciples of Jesus were also treating the Samaritans as outcastes. In Luke 9.51-55, we note the objection of desciples. **He wanted to train the apostles in accepting the Samaritans (and gentiles) also as people whom God cares.**

Jesus Crossed gender boundaries 4:27

Speaking, drinking and engaging in a private conversation with a caste woman

Engaging in a conversation with a woman, a caste woman, caused astonishment among the disciples**.** A Jewish man did not initiate conversation with an unknown woman! A Jewish teacher was never expected to engage in public conversation with a woman! No name is mentioned about this lady. Her caste name is given as prefix. The same is the case with all the caste population in this country, specially with a caste woman. **Jesus was not looking for a temporary respite from his thirst but for breaking a social taboo existed for generations.**

A caste woman always gets the bad name as immoral too. Some theologians want to ascertain that she was immoral based on the discussion about her husband and the time she chose to draw water. She came at noon time to avoid others and hence she was considered as immoral. A caste woman is always judged as immoral based on such interpretations and this would not have happened if she was not a Samaritan woman. **They are easily labeled as immoral and raped and killed by upper caste people.**

A casual reader of this text, may quickly jump into the conclusion that the Samaritan woman was an immoral woman. But if judged immoral, one should ask by which standards? By the Jewish or by the Samaritan Standards or by any other? **The Gospel writer does not explicitly name her to be immoral.** V.16-18 "It looks like that she had 5 husbands, perhaps divorced or deserted for 5 times and then she was cohabiting with a man with whom she was not married. The text does not discuss issues like who made her immoral? Why husbands left her one after another and why those men are not considered immoral? Who knows whether she was only a prey in the hands of the upper caste men and deserted by them one after another after being used as a sexual object? **Jesus is silent in this case unlike the incident in 'the woman caught in adultery' (better title is 'Missing men') making it clear that the men are more responsible in making women immoral.**

In the context of the economically poor, especially among women who are vulnerable and dependent on men for livelihood and security, cohabiting came out of a necessity for safe living. A wedding is considered an expensive affair in most cultures even today because it is associated with rituals and ceremonies that require money and time, therefore those who could afford the time and money would go for a wedding. **In South Africa many young Christian women choose cohabiting because they could not afford to get married in a Church and provide a wedding banquet.**

From the text in V. 19-20 we also see that this Samaritan woman stayed connected to her spiritual roots and remained well informed. Again in V. 39 we see that many believed because of the personal testimony of the Samaritan woman. This resulted in the other Samaritans urging Jesus to stay with them. So Jesus stayed with them for 2 more days and many more believed in Jesus as the Saviour of the world. Perhaps, the members of this community of Samaritans were economically poor and stayed oppressed but strickingly, they were spiritually in tune with God and were receptive to the Gospel.

The Church can and should inspire and strengthen community-led movements to inform and influence the issues of caste violence and communal disharmony. Such local-level movements also need to be connected with national movements. The idea of Neighbourhood communities or Family Forums is a very appropriate model for ensuring justice and peace. **The church should regain its original character of the church of the poor and ought to emerge as the church of the poor in India.**

Discrimination on the basis of gender, social, geographical or racial state, is tantamount to marring the image of God. Biblical advocacy is a response to the violation of the character and concerns of God. The tendency to consider those living outside the boundaries, as objects of charity is to be questioned. They are also people of God with the same dignity and worth created in the image and likeness of God. By being with the discriminated people, Jesus was protesting the attitude of the majority community towards them. We, as Christians, are called to break the boundaries and to cross the boundaries. ●

The Church can and should inspire and strengthen community-led movements to inform and influence the issues of caste violence and communal disharmony. Such local-level movements also need to be connected with national movements. The idea of Neighbourhood communities or Family Forums is a very appropriate model for ensuring justice and peace. The church should regain its original character of the church of the poor and ought to emerge as the church of the poor in India.

Can Anything Good Come From Nazareth?

R. Daniel Premkumar

After much hesitation and keen estimation, we came up with the moderate notion that there must be at least one million Independent Churches spread all over pan-India. This means, there are at least one million enterprising Pastors who succeeded in reaching out to the vulnerable communities giving birth to new faith communities. Imagine, founding countless number of way-side Worshipping Centers across India, sometimes in most hostile and volatile contexts. Such congregations comprise usually of people without social, material power except for dogged singular determination to obey the inner voice of God'. Someone asked me where did you get the data from? I responded saying to count the number of Independent Bible Schools in one street in Dimapur, Nagaland. In one locality like Kilpuak, Chennai, alone there are at least 31 Bible Schools, in Hennur locality Bangalore there are 29 Bible Institutes. So multiply each Bible school with a modest 10 students.

That is how one gets the number one million and counting. These Independent churches are lucky if they get one such graduate from such school, for most such faith bodies have Servants of God who have not even completed 5th Grade. Until one plunges into this intangible eco-sphere one could not even judge their length, breath, height or depth. When one confronts the enormity of the challenge we are reminded of a song from movies Sound of Music- 'How to solve problem like Maria'?

'How to solve problem like Maria'?

For traditional church functionaries looking at new independent church in the block, there could be three or more responses to these mushrooming numbers. First, just ignore and turn a blind eye to this ever expanding universe of living faith entities. Secondly, these way-side congregations could cause much consternation, discomfort and distrust. Thirdly, there are also some of us belonging to traditional Churches who view this New Life phenomena as a Kingdom opportunity to partner with this First Century ecclesial phenomenon re-occurring all over again in our generation. So the sacred task God bestows upon us is to partner with these multi ethnic, multi lingual independent congregations and to equip these worship leaders in pastoral skills, Biblical understanding, current social analysis, glimpse of Church history and more, as well as empower the vulnerable communities they serve. **Thanks are to God, there are today Ecumenical organizations addressing this very missional challenge.**

When Jesus prayed the High priestly Prayer (John 17) that they may all be one, prayer is not about forced Roman Uniformity in culture, language, belief, social order etc. We need to return to the Biblical heritage of Creation, inherent diversity, Twelve Tribes yet one nation etc mirrored in the Agency of Believers.

There is also theological underpinning in dealing with this complex issue. St. Francis of Assisi prophetically affirmed as early as 13th Century: 'the church has people whom God doesn't have, God has people whom Church doesn't have'. **Thus only God can decide who constitutes the Body of Christ! For during the 1st Century AD when the Apostles are gone one by one, Spirit inspired 'metaphors' like - ekklesia' & 'the body of Christ' that kept disparate faith entities across Asia keeping the Early Church together as a flock.**

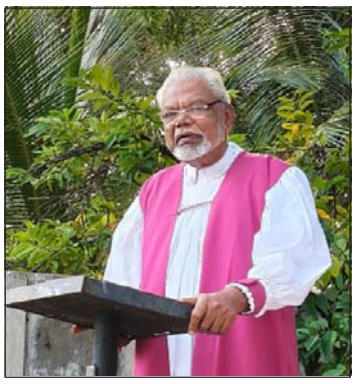
The Parable of the Oil Tanker

Years ago I came up with this parable, to illustrate how a Diocese can feel utterly helpless and clueless when caught up in a situation of turmoil totally oblivious to the truth that there are sixty thousand or more families behind small cadre' of clergy and Bishop who are better equipped to work their way through difficult and complex challenges.

This understanding also enables the church functionaries to revisit the miracle of Jesus 'Five Loaves and two fishes'

Droning 2000 years of church history:

All through the history of the church **the body of Christ** is comprised by almost the **'Agency of Worshippers or Believers'**



Rt. Rev. Dr. R. Daniel Premkumar is the Bishop of the Ruvuma Diocese of the Anglican Church, Tanzania

and a sprinkle of Priests, Bishops and Church Fathers.

Somewhere in the mid 20th Century Paulo Frère, a Brazilian Economist Priest, coined the phrase - 'the Agency of the Poor'. Frère affirms that one cannot discount their strength, vitality, dynamism and survival instincts of the Agency of the Poor. Similarly, we have before us the 'Agency of Believers' that appears to be under the church manual and discipline but the fact is that Agency is pointing to 'under cover' operations of innumerable activities on their own, ingeniously planned and executed with or without the approval of the Church by self appointed leaders and resources.

According to Frère the poor may look vulnerable, amorphous and may not count in the eyes of the State or Regime but in their own way the Agency of the Poor has dynamism, ingenuity, resilience and collective strength. Similarly, the Laity may not be materially poor but they possess soft power and the same features of ingenuity, worldly wisdom and survival instincts like their counterparts in the social realm.

Role of the clergy and the Bishops in the emerging *Agency of the Believers*

Surely, theologically trained Priests and Bishops are needed for counsel and advisory role not for admin to set the direction and goal for such a Lay Movement. We have witnessed the Global Church of various persuasions and doctrines but what comes out forcefully is that in the present Mainline Body of Christ except for a handful of older generation, the women and youth are missing in holding leadership responsibilities.

Yes, we have now the Christian Services in South Asia (formerly AMISA) founded by a small concerned group of Clergy with a life time record of ministry of empowering the laity in the Church focusing on training and capacity building of Independent Pastors and Congregations so that Agency of the Believers may be empowered with qualitative pastoral services.

The Under Currents of Interfaith Engagement by Agency of Believers

People to People Inter-faith Engagement is more an ongoing reality in the Agency of Believers. Simply because, people who constitute the Laity, are already in the forefront engaged in communion with people of other faiths and no faith. Whereas, the clergy and the Bishops continue to live in secluded and cloistered setting and keep conceptualizing and present long papers on how to engage with people of other faiths. **People to People engagement is already happening in vocations like Agriculture, Environmental Protection (ex: LGA Centre, Malapalle), and Quality Education etc. It is in these contexts that Interfaith Pilgrimage is already happening and all that needs to be done is to bless the movement and course correct if needed that sustains the journey, and in the name of Universal Christ unfold multi-faith resources to strengthen and sharpen the threshold crossing with Holy Spirit.**

Way Forward: Jesus was a Lay man

Jesus was a lay man; he could not be a priest in his times even if he wanted, for he was not born a Levite, but was born of the Tribe of Jesse. Jesus shunned the site of Priests and Pharisees. He viewed them as a mill-stone hung around the neck of Torah and the Prophets.

When Jesus prayed the High priestly Prayer (Jn 17) that they may all be one, prayer is not about forced Roman Uniformity in culture, language, belief, social order etc. We need to return to the Biblical heritage of Creation, inherent diversity, Twelve Tribes yet one nation etc mirrored in Agency of Believers.

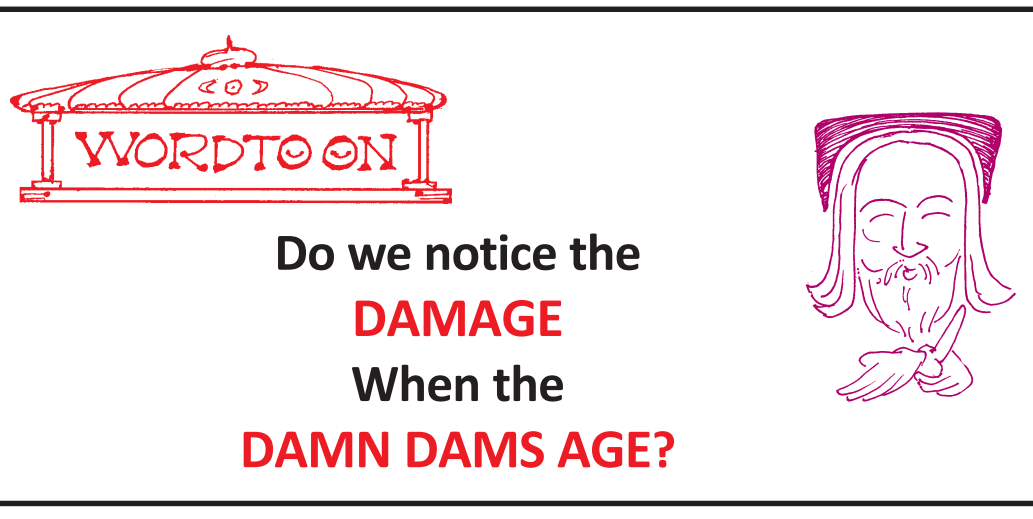
In 1970's there was an organized survey of the Un-baptized Christians of Chennai by the Gururkul Theological Institute and found that there are equal number of Christians practicsing Christianity outside church than inside the likes of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Agency of Believers defines what true ecumenism is. Agency of Believers defines the contours of church engaging in Inter-faith initiatives.

Agency of Believers speaks about making sense of this world not be over-anxious about the next.

True ecumenism is partnering with our own kindred across the road and whom they partner with moving towards New Orthodoxy (R Rohr). This cuts through rift, disagreements, doctrinal conflicts, bogged down with legal entanglements in many Old Line churches.

Finally, Agency of Believers in inching towards Universal Christ of Paul as in Col 1.18, Eph 1.10 – 'All things in Heaven and Earth' are summed up in Christ. ●

According to Paulo Frère, the poor may look vulnerable, amorphous and may not count in the eyes of the State or Regime but in their own way the Agency of the Poor has dynamism, ingenuity, resilience and collective strength. Similarly, the Laity may not be materially poor but they possess soft power and the same features of ingenuity, worldly wisdom and survival instincts like their counterparts in the social realm.



Young People's Column

Becoming Free, Becoming Human: A Theology of Grace and Communion

Aaron Joshua John

**When Paul declares that Christ has set us free,
he is not offering a slogan.
He is announcing a transformation that reaches the core of our being.
And when he says, stand firm, he is not scolding but reminding:
freedom is a beginning, not an end.
It must be received with gratitude and guarded with wisdom.**

Freedom is not a new desire. Every generation longs for it, defines it, legislates it, and yet remains curiously restless in its pursuit. In political arenas, freedom is equated with rights; in consumer culture, with choice; in modern psychology, with autonomy. But the Apostle Paul, in Galatians 5:1, anchors freedom in a different register. This is not the freedom to do whatever one pleases, but the freedom made possible because of Christ. It is a freedom not constructed by human effort, but given.Yet Paul warns, this freedom can be lost, not forcibly taken, but surrendered voluntarily by returning to the systems, patterns, or postures that once enslaved. His call to "stand firm" is not a defensive manoeuvre; it is an invitation to maturity. What, then, is the nature of this freedom? And why does it bring joy?

Freedom as Becoming Fully Human

Christian freedom is not the same as escaping boundaries. It is, in fact, the process by which a person becomes more fully themselves, released from fear, guilt, and fragmentation, and opened towards communion. **The early Christian imagination did not think of salvation as simply being saved 'from' something; it was being saved 'for' something; participation in the divine life, and a return to one's true form.**

In this light, freedom is a creative responsibility. It is the condition in which love becomes possible, not as command, but as spontaneous joy. To be free is to act without compulsion, to give without calculation, and to serve without humiliation. This is not the immature freedom of impulse or novelty, but the mature freedom of wisdom, what one calls it the "freedom of alignment," where the 'heart' and 'will' are no longer in conflict. This interior liberation is not easily attained. It is a path of self-awareness, humility, and trust. And it cannot be sustained by ego or ideology. **It must be rooted in grace. The joy that flows from such freedom is not loud or ecstatic, it is quiet, steady, and radiant. It is the joy of no longer performing for worth, and no longer fearing the silence of one's own soul.**

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He is a Priest of
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Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

Freedom Requires Inner Vigilance

There is a quiet irony in Paul's words, one can be set free, and yet choose to return to bondage. The "yoke" may take different forms, external rules, internal compulsions, inherited systems of worth, but the danger is always the same: the slow forgetting of freedom's origin.

True freedom always involves vigilance. Not the anxious self-protection of legalism, but a cultivated awareness that freedom can erode, not through violence, but through complacency. One cannot be passively free; one must remain in freedom actively, intentionally. **The spiritual disciplines, prayer, silence, service, study, are not restraints, but ways of keeping freedom alive. They prevent freedom from becoming abstraction. As one modern theologian put it, freedom is not merely to choose, but to choose well, with conscience formed, desires transformed, and love at the centre. When such freedom matures, it turns outward: it builds communities of trust, restores ruptured relationships, and dismantles the subtle tyrannies within ourselves.**

The joy of Christian freedom is not found in escape but in return, to God, to others, to oneself. It is not the fleeting thrill of rebellion, nor the fragile calm of control. **It is the joy of rootedness, of purpose, of living without masks or fear.** When Paul declares that Christ has set us free, he is not offering a slogan. He is announcing a transformation that reaches the core of our being. And when he says, stand firm, he is not scolding but reminding: freedom is a beginning, not an end. It must be received with gratitude and guarded with wisdom.

Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios reminds us, "True freedom is the ability to become fully human, in communion with God, others, and the world." For him, freedom is not arbitrary license, but a state of deep inner harmony, a life animated by truth, responsibility, and love. In this vision, the joy of freedom is not self-celebration, but self-transcendence. It is the movement toward wholeness, where we are no longer bound by insecurity or pride, but drawn into the divine rhythm of life.

To live in this freedom is to taste joy, not the kind that fades, but the kind that deepens. The joy of being free because we are loved, and of loving because we are free.

●

God with us on the Road

**The Incarnate God is a God at the margins.
The Incarnate God is a God on the road who sojourns with us.
It is this God who challenges us to make our times of vulnerability productive,
helping us realize our true condition in the world, and inspiring us to open ourselves
to respond to others who are hurting or on the margins.
God is a fellow traveler always on the road with us.**

>>> Contd. from Page 2 Col. 4

woman (Mt 15:21–28; Mk 7:24 – 30), his response to the Roman centurion (Mt 8:5–13; Lk 7:1 –10), and many other encounters illustrate Jesus' willingness to go beyond borders and narrow interpretations of the Law in obedience to a greater law of love (Mk 12:28 – 34).

Finally, the *Visio Dei* (Vision of God) is about looking at the world in such a way that the kingdom of God shapes our vision about who we are in the world. It acknowledges the role of national identities but recognizes that the deepest allegiances of Christians are predicated on a mission of reconciliation, meaning that the borders that define countries may have some relative value but are not ultimately those that define the body of Christ.

Theology offers not just more information but a new imagination. It supplies a way of thinking about Incarnation that keeps the human issues at the center of the debate and reminds us that our own existence as a pilgrim people on the move. Christian discipleship leads us to overcome all that divides us to reconcile our relationships, reminding us that the more difficult walls to cross are the ones that exist in the hearts of each of us. We are unable to cross these divides by ourselves. Christian faith rests ultimately in the one who incarnated from heaven to earth and, through His death and resurrection, passed over from death to life.

God is the God of the journey. God is a God on the road with us. This is most clearly expressed in God's journey with his people as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:20-22). God is the exiled God: the glory of God leaves the temple (Ezekiel 8:1 to 11:25) and God joins His people in exile. God as God on the move is clearly seen in the New Testament narrative: for example, Jesus' refugee status in the flight from Herod's killing fields; Jesus' marginal status as coming from the rogue province of Galilee; his non-professional status in the hierarchical society of his time; his itinerant ministry in Palestine; his subsequent transition from outskirts to the Centre of power in Jerusalem; and, most centrally, his migration into human form in the incarnation.

The first and the most obvious thing that should be said is that our life's experiences are not to be negated but need to be brought with us in our reading of the Scripture, our prayers, and our engagement with the wider world. Some of life's experiences are more significant than others and, therefore, have been more formative. We need to make such experiences productive. In my case, being on the road has been a blessing. It has made me aware of loss and gain. It has made me open to the other, to those who are strange and different. It has made me somewhat comfortable with ambiguity and liminality. And, it has brought me into contact with the God on the road rather than simply the static God in the temple or the church.

The Incarnate God we profess, and experience is a messy, rather than a tidy God. The Incarnate God is there during our ambiguity, pain, lament, confusion, and questioning.

The Incarnate God is a God at the margins. The Incarnate God is a God on the road who sojourns with us. It is this God who challenges us to make our times of vulnerability productive, helping us realize our true condition in the world, and inspiring us to open ourselves to respond to others who are hurting or on the margins.

God is a fellow traveler always on the road with us.

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Mammen Varkey

"And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." ……And after that no one dared to ask him any question." Mark 12: 28-34 (RSV)

The greatest commandment – 2

Re-ordering, by a subverter of the Law

Inquirer, not far from the Kingdom of God

On hearing Jesus' answer, the scribe who went to the Master asking, "Which commandment is the first of all?..." said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he;...." Mark 12: 33. The wise response of the scribe made Jesus to say, " You are not far from the kingdom of God." Through this statement Jesus was acknowledging the genuine nature of the inquiry of the scribe. So, according to Mark, the scribe is an authentic inquirer. It means that he was genuinely searching for the re-ordering of the laws and for re-prioritization of the religious tenets dominant during that time.

Of crucial implications in this world

The most striking thing about the scribe's inquiry is that he was seeking the re-ordering or re-prioritization of the commandments not from an acknowledged authority of the Law. Nor from a venerated religious head. The scribe who was one 'not far from the kingdom of God', sought the answer from a subverter of Law. Yes, not from a recognized and reputed exponent of Law but from a subverter of Law! The one who was branded as a 'subverter of Law' and one who was sought to be eliminated for blatant violation of the Law was asked to bring out the essence of the Law! **It has some crucial implications in a world of blind followers of religious tenets and of 'status – quoist' religious practitioners.**

A call to reject 'the prioritization by the priests'

In a world where the 'status – qouist' religious interpreters galore, it is a matter of much significance. Jesus' reply should also be seen as a call to re-understand the Law limited by the way the Priests and the Pharisees held the Law, interpreted and prioritized them. And a powerful, inescapeable call to rise, go beyond, transcend the formulations and practices of the laws of the world. In that sense, this question must also be put in the same category of the question as the one he was asked earlier, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?". Mark 12:14.

An occasion to re-define the essential purpose of religion

It must also be noted that on the part of the Master, he did not hesitate to face the scribe whether he was a genuine inquirer or not, whether he was sent by the scribes and the Pharisees to entrap him or not. Mark 12: 13. **He dared to re-order or re-prioritize the Law that contained, according to some sources, 365 prohibitions and 248 positive commands. It was seen by Jesus as a great opportunity to re-prioritize the 613 laws.**

In fact, it must be seen as an occasion when Jesus re-defined the basic purpose of religion. ●

To be continued

LAMP UNTO THE FEET, LIGHT UNTO THE PATH

Let The Alien Consciousness Be Strong In Us?

A. V. Itty

Ps. 119:17-24

"I am here on earth for just a little while; do not hide your commands from me" (v.19).

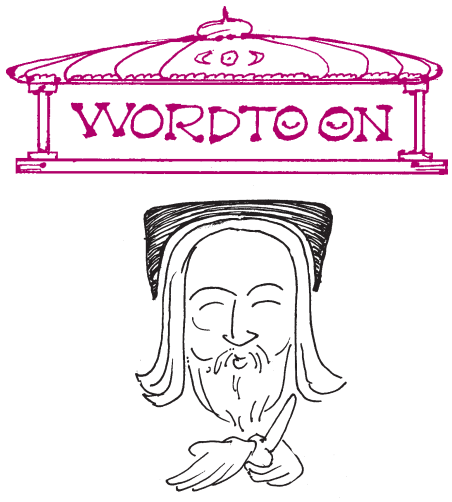
Psalm 119, consisting of 122 sections, each having eight verses, provides us with an integrated philosophy of life. The realisation that we are "aliens on this earth" is the basis of an integrated philosophy of life. Another aspect of this philosophy of life is the keenness to lead this life in exile, strictly following God's covenants. That is why the Psalmist prays: "Open my eyes, so that I may see the wonderful truths in your law" (v.18).

When God opens our eyes, reveals the essence of His words, and we show willingness to live accordingly, we will be able to lead an integrated Christian life.

David has repeatedly said in his Psalms: "Like all my ancestors I am only your guest for a little while here on earth." (Ps. 39:12) We, who are aliens and in exile, should not live here, thinking that this world is our eternal home. Today's life is only a bridge between this world and the world that is to come. No one having common sense will be ready to live comfortably in a house built on a bridge. But, they will certainly make use of the bridge.

What are the spheres of life, where the children of God should reveal that they are aliens here? In thoughts, in words, in actions, in values and in priorities: in short, they have the responsibility to reveal it in every sphere of their lives. St. Paul exhorts believers: "Keep your minds fixed on things there on the high, not on things here on earth" (Col.3:2). Does it mean that we should live on earth without thinking about any physical matters? It only means that the children of God should not be bound to anything on the earth. It only means that we should live, seriously taking into consideration the exhortation of the Apostle: "The love of money is a source of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). May God give us the grace for that. ●

Prof. A. V. Itty, former Professor of English at Bishop Moore College, Mavelikara, is, now, engaged in the Evangelical, and Educational Ministry undertaken by ADORE in the Rayagada Dist. of Odisha. 94950 17850 (Mob)



Food For Thought:

God's covenants should be a song to us in the houses where we live as aliens!

Christian Conference of Asia
an organ and fellowship of churches and ecumenical councils in asia for initiating and facilitating dynamic christian witness and action

Fifth Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA-2026)

Theme "Break Every Yoke"

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) will organise an Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) from 17 to 21 April 2026 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, under the theme "Break Every Yoke" (Isaiah 58:6).

The landmark youth gathering in April 2026 will be the fifth ecumenical youth assembly organised by the CCA in its ecumenical journey.

AEYA - 2026 will provide opportunities for Asian youth to reflect on global and regional issues from biblical and theological perspectives, and to analyse the complex web of social, economic, cultural, political, and ecological challenges that affect the lives of young people in Asia.

Explaining the main objectives of AEYA-2026, CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara said, "Asia stands today at a crossroads, where an array of challenges often creates disillusionment among Asian youth. In this context, AEYA-2026 will provide a platform for young Asian Christians to come together and reflect on emerging Asian realities within a broader contextual thematic framework, 'Break Every Yoke' (Isaiah.58:6)."

AEYA-2026 will address major dilemmas faced by Asian youth, including economic pressures, mental health struggles, rapid and complex cultural shifts, the impact of migration, political disillusionment, systemic discrimination, social media pressure, cyberbullying, unemployment and limited opportunities, distrust of both tradition and modernity, and political disengagement. These challenges contribute to a growing gap between aspirations and opportunities, affecting the stability and well-being of young Asians across the region.

The deliberations of AEYA will also enable participants to share and learn from each other's lived experiences, while highlighting the creativity, resilience, and spiritual vitality of Asian youth. It will include networking opportunities, country spotlights on specific situations, and testimonies shared by people from some of the most vulnerable situations in Asia, the CCA General Secretary added.

AEYA-2026 aims to strengthen the ecumenical vision of Christian youth and to nurture a new generation committed to fostering unity and peace with justice in the household of God.

The programmes of AEYA will include thematic presentations, theological and biblical reflections, plenary discussions, workshops, contextual exposures, creative expressions, and common worship. **Participants will explore contemporary issues affecting Asian societies, within the framework of Christian discipleship and public witness.**

CCA will cover the expenses for accommodation, meals, and local transportation for all selected participants. Limited international travel subsidies will be available for youth from South and Southeast Asian countries, in accordance with the CCA Travel Subsidy Policy. Participants from South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Australia are encouraged to bear their own travel expenses by seeking sponsorship from their respective churches or organisations. ***– CCA News***

cheerchat

The future belongs to
nations with
GRAINS,
not
GUNS

– M. S. Swaminathan

World Communion of Reformed Churches

Guided by Faith and Justice: Rev. Philip Vinod Peacock Installed as WCRC General Secretary

>>> Contd. from Page 1 Col. 1

Palestine **have inspired the Reformed family worldwide."**

Rev. Peacock, who assumed office on Jan. 1, previously served as WCRC executive secretary for justice and witness, guiding global initiatives on economic and ecological justice rooted in the Reformed tradition. An ordained minister of the Church of North India, he holds a Master of Theology from Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary and has taught Dalit and feminist theology at Bishop's College in Kolkata. He is currently pursuing a PhD, and his scholarly work, mentorship, and publications have shaped theological and ecumenical discourse internationally.

Dr. Jerry Pillay also highlighted Peacock's organizational acumen and his ability to navigate complex global challenges, from climate change and migration crises to gender-based violence and political instability. **"His extraordinary ability to network and cultivate relationships, alongside his commitment to justice and sustainability, will help build a solid foundation for the WCRC's future," Pillay said.**

The ceremony featured greetings from Rev. Dr. Anne Burghardt, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), who underscored the long-standing relationship between Lutheran and Reformed traditions. She highlighted initiatives such as the *Wittenberg Witness*, a shared commitment to reconciliation and justice, as examples of mutual enrichment.

"While the Reformed tradition continually calls the church to justice, the Lutheran tradition reminds us of the centrality of grace," Burghardt said. She emphasized trust, relationship-building, and the importance of defending freedom of faith, especially as Christians face growing challenges in parts of the world. She urged churches to model cooperation and multilateral engagement as a countercultural witness in an era of declining international collaboration.

Rev. Philip Vinod Peacock, general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches speaks during the installation ceremony at the the Reformed Church in Hannover, Germany on 1 February 2026.
Photo: World Communion of Reformed Churches

Both leaders praised Peacock's ability to elevate the voices of marginalized communities, foster cross-cultural dialogue, and lead with humility, compassion, and inclusivity. Pillay's anecdotes illustrated Peacock's courage and respect for structure, qualities that shape both his decision-making and relational approach to leadership.

"With his vision grounded in faith and justice, Philip Peacock's leadership is set to inspire new generations of Reformed Christians to walk courageously in faith, hope, and love," Pillay said.

With more than 230 member churches in 107 countries, representing over 100 million Christians worldwide, the WCRC continues its mission of promoting unity, justice, and transformation across the global Reformed family. Ecumenical leaders expressed confidence that Peacock's tenure will strengthen collaboration, deepen theological engagement, and enhance the Communion's global witness.

– WCRC News

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A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

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